

LOST IN THE WHIRL.

BY HELEN F. CLARK.

"Well, did we make out to-day?" asked farmer Wallace, gruffly, of his daughter Lizzie, as he drew his chair up to the supper table.

The girl's eyes were red with weeping, and she choked back a sob as she answered.

"No, sir, Johnson's is full. They've no room for new hands. I went over to Hacktown to the mills, but Lawrence says they've promised ever so many hands ahead to take them on when the fall work commences, but they are laying off the girls now. I went down to Mrs. Jennings' boardinghouse, too, to see if she would give me a place to wait on the table, but she's got all her girls for this season.

The man's dark eyebrows contracted in a dark frown.

"I—I—thought, maybe, father, if you could just give me one more term at school I could pass the examination and get a place to teach, I know," she added, hastily, seeing her father's angry look, "that there's no vacancy round here, but you know cousin Martha wrote that they had no teacher down where she is in West Virginia, and she was sure I could get the school there if I could only pass the examination. I could board with her, you know."

"I don't care where you board, and I'll not give you another term's schooling. I've taken care of you for seventeen years, and I'll not take care of you any longer. Your big enough now to earn your own furbelows. I've got enough young ones to work for without workin' fer 'em when they git to be seventeen years old."

"But, father, what can I do? I've been to every place I know of around here and I can't find work of any kind."

"Then go where there is work. Shanksville ain't the only place in the world."

"Do you want me to go away from home?" asked the girl with whitening lips.

"I don't care where you go, so long's you git out o' here," exclaimed the man, brutally.

"I'll go, father," said the girl, in a strange, hard tone that they had never heard from her before, and rising from the table she went up stairs to her room.

It was only a low attic room, shared with her by an older sister. As she looked about her a dumb agony showed itself in her face, for it was home to her, the home where she was born, and where the seventeen years of her uneventful life had been spent. She sat down by the low window, and looked out through the unpainted wooden shutters to the garden below, where she and her sister had planted beds of bright blooming flowers, trying to make the rough farm yard look home like. But every familiar sight seemed to sting her to-night, and with a suffering too deep for tears, she covered her burning eyes with her hands.

When night came and her sister came up to bed, to please her she undressed and lay down beside her. The elder girl put an arm about her sister and sobbed.

"Oh, Lizzie, it seems like I ought to be the one to go, not you, for I'm well nigh onto twenty now."

"Never mind, Em, you've always been such a help to mother that he'll be sure to let you stay. I'm not strong enough to do the washings and such work, and never was. I could teach, if he would only let me do that, but he won't. Don't fret, Em, help mother all you can. I'll get along some way. Father never did care much for me, anyway, there's no use denying it, but he don't mind you. He won't send you away."

"I don't want to go, Lizzie; it seems as if I would almost break my heart, and mother just does nothing but groan all the time."

The long hours dragged slowly on, but no sleep came to either that night, and they rose at early dawn with weary, pallid faces.

Lizzie quietly folded her few articles of dress and packed them in a small valise, and with hat and sash went down stairs just as the family were rising from breakfast.

"Good-bye, father," she said, holding out her hand to him as he turned to leave the room.

"Good-by," he answered harshly, without taking her hand or even looking toward her.

"Eat some breakfast, Lizzie," said her mother, whose tear stained face, in which the lines of care seemed deeper than ever this morning, showed that the father's attitude was not hers. "I've made you some of those biscuits you like so well." The girl sat down to the deserted table and tried hard to eat, to please the mother who had all her life been her best friend, and to drink the coffee her sister had kept warm for her.

And then she took each little wondering brother and sister in her arms and kissed them good-by, and finally turned to her mother.

"Where are you goin', Liz, where are you goin'?" Her mother half-tottered and then caught hold of the back of a chair for support.

"To the city, I think that's where father meant I should go."

"Don't go there, Liz." A look of fear crossed her aged face.

"I can't get work any where else, mother. I must go there."

"Oh! It seems as if I'm never to see

ye again," cried the poor woman with a gesture of despair and grief.

For a moment the girl's fortitude threatened to give way, and she could make no answer.

Her elder sister was sobbing, and even the little children were crying, though they could not understand what it all meant.

"Good-bye!" said the girl, at last, and put her face against her mother's for the last time. Her sister went down the path with her to the gate.

"Be sure and write, Lizzie. Remember some of us love ye anyway," she said, as she embraced her closely.

"Tell mother, Em, that if I don't see her again here, I'll come up to Heaven to meet her, where I know she'll go. Tell her I'll come sure, and tell her I've got my Bible with me."

And then they parted, and Lizzie Wallace went down the dusty road, under the leafy boughs of the trees in the lane, along the grassy river bank, and just before noon entered the streets of the nearest village and made her way to the depot.

The east bound train rumbled in, snorting and puffing, and the young girl mounted the platform and was soon being rapidly borne to the city.

"What do you want?" asked a snipish voice across the desk.

"I'm looking for work, sir."

"We don't want any new hands."

"I can soon learn," said the girl, imploringly.

"Don't want you; I've got enough hands now."

Slowly she made her way down the dark stairway to the street. She had been in the city three months, and had taken a cheap lodging in a poor but decent neighborhood, and from there had gone out to look for work. At first she applied to stores and factories in vain, until her few dollars were quite spent, and then, at last, she succeeded in getting employment for a few weeks at making artificial flowers, her slender, dextrous fingers being wonderfully expert in that line; but then the dull times came on, and she, with a hundred others, was laid off.

Then she applied to an agency for a situation as a domestic, but after having paid her fee they had no further use for her. When she went to the office, women looking for servants passed over the slight, frail girl, seeking for some one of more muscular outlines. Then, too, her lack of references were against her, for she knew no one in the city, and now she had been out of work many weeks, and her money was gone. Her clothing had been pawned to pay for the furnished room in which she lodged, and she had nothing left but the scanty apparel she wore. All day long she had gone from place to place, begging for work, and everywhere had met with the old excuse, "Too many hands already."

Towards evening she came opposite the old flower-making establishment where she had first been employed.

"It seems useless," she whispered to herself, "but I'll go in anyway and see if Mr. O'Rell don't want me. He might have an order that needed to be hurried through. Even one day's work will bring me money for food." O'Rell was in his office and looked at the haggard face before him with a sinister gleam in his evil eyes.

"No, Miss Wallace, we've no extra orders in at present. Of course you can take your chances with the other girls in the fall, but we always give the preference to the ones that have been here longest. I think you had better look for something else to do."

A look of despair settled on the girl's face, and she brushed bitter tears from her streaming eyes as she made her way to the street.

Near by was a bakery, and in the window a tempting display of breads and pastry was arranged. She was very hungry. It was many hours since she had tasted food, and she stopped involuntarily and looked through the glass. It was closing time, and the workmen poured out of the shop she had just left, and went hurrying past her down the street. But she paid no heed to them; for weary, foot-sore, exhausted and starving, her thoughts were far away on a low, unpainted farm-house with the wooded hill-side back of it, and as she thought of the well filled table they were even then spreading for the evening meal, a great cry rose up in her heart, "Oh, father, there was enough and to spare there, and I am starving here!"

Some one touched her on the arm, and turning hurriedly she saw O'Rell standing beside her.

"Oh, Miss Wallace," said he carelessly, "I'm just going over to L—House for dinner. Won't you come with me?"

The girl looked at him in amazement, but no suspicion as to his motive crossed her mind, and after a moment's hesitation she accepted the offer almost awkwardly, and went with him.

She was terrible hungry, and the food seemed like nectar to her, and she had no thought of danger. The evil look in the rich man's eyes she did not perceive, but when he set before her a glass of shimmering wine she shrank back aghast.

"I—I—don't drink wine, sir; please don't ask me to take it."

"Don't drink wine? Tea then, I suppose. Waiter, just bring this lady a cup of tea." And to the grinning waiter behind her he gave a well understood signal.

Half fearfully she drank the tea, for her employer's eyes were upon her, and a sense of her obligation to him

made her dread to displease him.

But she had scarce put the cup down when a sudden dizziness smote her, and when she rose to leave the place the room seemed to reel about her, and staggering forward she fell heavily against the chairs. The mocking waiters, in obedience to the fashionable dressed man, put her in a carriage, and he got in with her and shut the door, while the coachman rolled away on his dastardly errand to another part of the city.

The summer months passed quickly by, and fall came on with its brilliant foliage garnishing forest and hillside, till the winter snow put their glory, and dressed the striped boughs and naked trunks with her white feathery robes. For long weeks she spread over the city a coating of ice, and breathed her frosty breath upon it, till the fair spring broke from the wintry bondage and clothed the earth with verdure again.

It was on one of the early nights of spring when Annie Lane walked quietly homeward from the little church which she attended. She was only a working girl, and lived, as do hundreds of others, in a tiny furnished room. But she was a pure, sweet girl, with a face shining with the Christ-love, and eyes mirroring the noble, loyal soul behind them.

Her way lay, for a block, along a dangerous street, lined on either side by brilliantly lighted, gaudy houses.

She involuntarily quickened her pace here, and hurried past with beating heart. Suddenly, just before her, a great door was thrown open, letting a blaze of light shine out across the pavement, while a man's figure stood there in a momentary struggle, and then with a dull thud a woman's body was flung violently down from step to step to the ground, and the heavy doors closed rentlessly behind it.

The young girl bent over the prostrate form at her feet, and raised to her knee a face as young as her own, but thin and wasted with fever, and lined with the awful marks of misery and degradation.

"Mother—mother—" murmured the pale lips, brokenly.

"Have you no where to go?" asked pitying Annie Lane.

The girl opened her eyes wearily. "I thought it was mother; but I'll never see her again. No, I've nowhere to go. But—she spoke with difficulty—it don't matter—I'll—soon—die—anyway."

The sudden tears of sympathy rolled down the other's cheeks.

"Do you think you could walk a little way, just two blocks further on?"

"I—I—don't know. I'm so tired to-night."

Anna helped her to stagger to her feet and then, half carrying her, moved slowly toward her own little home. It seemed a long walk, and many times the sick girl stopped to rest, but they reached the room at last, and Anna laid her upon her own white bed and bathed her feverish brow.

All night the sick girl tossed to and fro in wild delirium, talking sometimes of a far off country home, and calling mother and sisters and brothers to come to her, and then in her ravings hurried bitter invectives at the man who had ruined her. But before the morning light had dawned, the restless head ceased its rolling, and consciousness came back to the dying girl, and she looked up at the sweet young face bending over her.

"I was as pure and as good as you are once," she said, "and I had no thought that I would ever be an outcast, black from sin. Oh, God! I did not know there was such misery in the world. Tell me," she muttered hoarsely, "must I forgive him to go to heaven? I promised mother that I'd meet her there. Is it too late now?" she cried out, piteously.

"The blood of Jesus Christ cleanse us from all sin," answered the other, earnestly.

"But can it cleanse away such a sin as mine? I never meant to do it—God knows I didn't."

"He can save to the uttermost. Though you sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow," answered Anna.

"Listen! Let me tell you the story, and then tell me if He can forgive, for, oh, I want to see my mother again, and I promised—I promised sure I should meet her in Heaven."

She waited a moment to gather strength, and then went on:

"My name is Lizzie Wallace. I came to the city a year ago to get work. But I walked and walked day after day and could find nothing to do. At last my money was gone, and I was hungry—oh, so hungry—and a man came along, a man that I knew, and he asked me to go and eat dinner with him. I did not know what that invitation meant. I thought he was sorry for me because I could not get work. But when we were eating he drugged me, and I fell over and knew nothing more for hours afterwards, when I woke to find myself an outcast—a lost woman. Oh, God! I did not know there were such fiends in the world. And because he was afraid I would tell the police and put him in prison for it, he kept me there, locked in a room for days and weeks and months, till I was rancid with despair and shame. And then I fell sick and became so weak and helpless that they refused to have me there any longer, and to-night he brought me down in his drunkenness and flung me into the street."

"But I'm glad he did. I'd rather lie out there on the stones of the street than inside those walls. I'm

glad that God has appointed some other place for me to die than at the gates of hell. Oh! I did not mean to go there! Do you think that he will forgive me?"

"Yes, yes, dear sister. The sin is not yours, and our kind Heavenly Father, who is a righteous judge, will not hold it against you."

"It was only one of many girls," Lizzie continued faithfully. "Some went down through love of dress, some were driven to it by starvation, and many, many more were deceived and lured on to destruction as I was, not knowing where they went. Ah! There are a thousand pitfalls on every side for the woman who stands alone. Other people don't see them. Only we who talk that way can feel and understand them. God help the working girls!"

Their tears flowed together, for both knew and understood of what she spoke.

The sun had just thrown a faint ray across the gray eastern sky when the sick girl spoke again, while her breath grew perceptibly shorter.

"I'm going—to die—very—soon. Write to mother and Emma—tell them—I never meant—to do it—but Jesus—will wash—the sin—away. You said—He—would do it—and I'm sure—He—will—for I promised—mother sure—that I'd—meet her—there."

A soft halo of golden light fell over the city from the fast rising sun, when she turned once more and whispered:

"I—hear—Jesus—calling—me—so I—know—He's—forgiven—me." The sentence was never finished, for a smile of infinite peace came over the thin face, and she went home to be with the Lord who had redeemed her; and when the sun rose in his glory and shone in through the parted curtains, it fell upon the dead face of one of those sad ones who are lost in the whirl.

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